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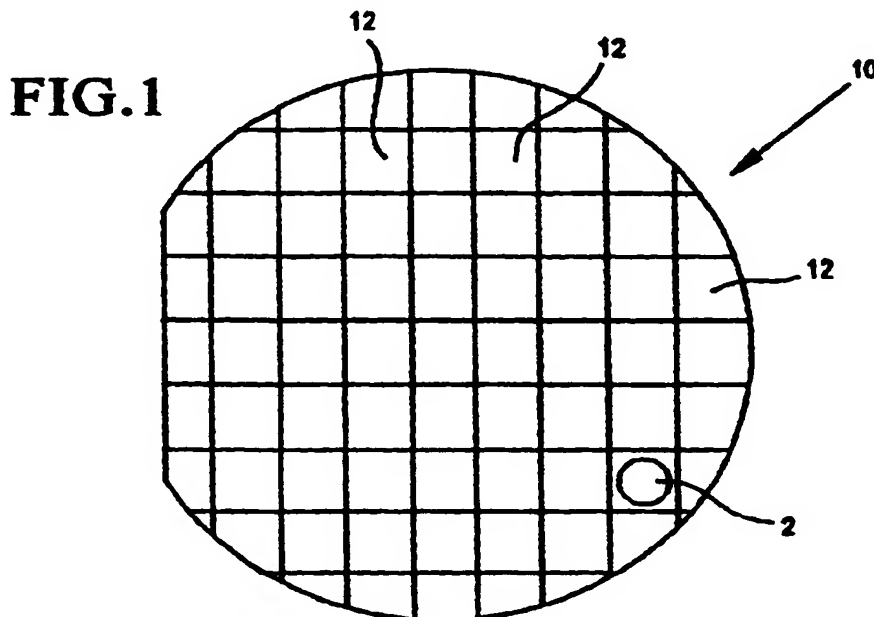
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(54) **Method for optimizing probe card analysis and scrub mark analysis data**

(57) A method for quantitatively determining probe card errors relying on merging data sets from a probe card analysis machine and a scrub mark analysis machine. Minimizing error values related to the data

sets provides an indication of probe card/ probe machine combination tolerance.



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Description

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] This invention relates to semiconductor test equipment. More specifically, the invention relates to methods for determining errors in a semi-conductor probe card and probe machine.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] A variety of equipment and techniques have been developed to assist manufacturers of integrated circuits for testing those circuits while still in the form of dies on semiconductor wafers. In order to quickly and selectively electrically interconnect metalized contact pads (also known as "bonding pads") on each die to electrical test equipment (known as a "prober machine"), arrays of slender wires or other contact media are provided. The contact media are arranged on conventional printed circuit boards so as to be positionable on the metalized contact pads associated with each semiconductor die. As is well known by those of ordinary skill in the art, those printed circuit board test cards have come to be known as "probe cards" or "probe array cards", and the contact media have come to be known as "probe card pins" or "probe pins" or "probe wires".

[0003] As the component density of semiconductor circuits has increased, the number of contact pads associated with each die has increased. It is now not uncommon for a single die to have upwards of 600 pads electrically associated with each die. The metalized pads themselves may have as little as a ten μm gap therebetween with an on-center spacing on the order of 50 μm to 100 μm . As a result, the slender probe wires of the probe array cards have become much more densely packed. It is highly desirable that the free ends or "tips" of the probes be aligned in a common horizontal plane, as well as have the proper positioning with respect to one another within the plane so that when the probes are pressed down onto the metalized pads of an integrated circuit die by a prober machine, the probes touch down substantially simultaneously, and with equal force while being on target. As used herein, the terms "touch-down", "rest" and "first contact" have the same meaning. In the process of making electrical contact with the pads, the probes are "over traveled" causing the probes to deflect from their rest position. This movement is termed "scrub" and must be taken into account in determining whether the rest position and the over travel position of the probes are within specification for the probe card.

[0004] The assignee of the present invention has developed equipment for testing the electrical characteristics, planarity and horizontal alignment, as well as scrub characteristics of various probe cards and sells such equipment under its Precision Point™ line of probe

card array testing and rework stations. A significant component of these stations is a planar working surface known as a "checkplate". A check plate simulates the semi-conductor die undergoing a test by a probe card while checking the above described characteristics of the probes. A suitable check plate for use with the assignee's Precision Point™ equipment is described in detail in United States Patent No. 4,918,379 to Stewart *et al.* issued April 17, 1990, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. It is sufficient for the purposes of this disclosure to reiterate that while the subject probe card is held in a fixed position the check plate is moved horizontally in steps when testing the horizontal relative positioning, and vertically in steps when testing the touchdown contact and over travel position of each probe tip. Previously, and as described in the above-identified patent, horizontal position information for each probe tip was determined by translating an isolated probe tip in steps across resistive discontinuities on the check plate. In recent years, this technique has been altered by placing a transparent, optical window in the surface contact plane of the check plate with a sufficiently large surface dimension so as to permit a probe tip to reside thereon. An electronic camera viewing the probe tip through the window digitizes the initial touch down image of the probe, and a displaced position of the probes due to "scrub" as the check plate is raised to "over travel" the probe. The initial touch down position is compared to the anticipated touch down position to assist an operator in realigning that particular probe.

[0005] Another prior art technique for determining relative probe tip positions in a horizontal (e.g. X-Y) plane is described in United States Patent 5,657,394 to Schwartz *et al.*, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. The system disclosed therein employs a precision movement stage for positioning a video camera into a known position for viewing probe points through an optical window. Analysis of the video image and the stage position information are used to determine the relative positions of the probe points. In systems of this type, a "reference" probe position is determined primarily through information from the video camera, combined with position information from the precision stage. If the pitch of the probes on the probe card is small enough, two or more probes can be simultaneously imaged with the video camera. The position of this adjacent probe is then referenced with respect to the "reference" probe from information from the video camera only. The camera is then moved to a third probe, adjacent to the second probe and this process is repeated until each probe on the entire probe card has been imaged.

[0006] In addition to the above devices for measuring various parameters of probe cards, equipment is available for measuring actual "scrub marks" made by probe card pins on a test wafer which has been impressed by the probe card with a prober machine.

One such apparatus is manufactured by Visioneering Research Laboratory, Inc., Las Cruces, New Mexico to provide high quality imaging of scrub marks made by a probe card and a prober machine. It is well known that scrub patterns analyzed by a probe card analysis (hereinafter "PCA") machine do not match the scrub marks produced on a test wafer imaged by a scrub mark analysis (hereinafter "SMA") machine. The test wafer models the surface characteristics of bonding pads on a semiconductor die.

[0007] As stated above, the measurement surface on the probe card analyzer is typically manufactured from hardened steel, or more recently a transparent synthetic or natural crystal such as sapphire. This PCA testing surface is much harder than the aluminized surface of a semiconductor bonding pad. The typical annealed aluminum surface of a semi-conductor bonding pad in fact yields under pressures applied by the semiconductor probing machine which may be on the order of 5 grams per pin. Remembering that the pin surface is very small, the pressure applied is sufficient to break the surface of the aluminum bonding pad causing the probe tip to "dig in" during probe pin overtravel. Within a short distance, the tip of the probe pin plows so deeply into the aluminum surface that it stops even though the probe card continues its downward travel. This phenomenon has been characterized as "stubbing" by the assignee of the present invention. In contrast, the hard metal or sapphire surface of the probe card analysis machine does not yield under pressure from the probe pin. In addition, the metal or sapphire contact surface of the probe card analysis machine is highly polished and has a much lower coefficient of friction than does the aluminized surface of the semiconductor die bonding pad. As a result, the probe pin does not "stub" on the probe card analysis machine, and the probe pin tip travels further than it does on the aluminized bonding pad. Furthermore, the place at which the probe pin first contacts an aluminized bonding pad (or the aluminized semiconductor test wafer which simulates the bonding pad in the scrub mark analysis machine) or "touch down" position of the probe pin is not readily discernable in the scrub mark made in the aluminum surface. The scrub mark resembles a brush stroke with a faint starting position and a deep, clearly defined ending position. Conversely, the probe card analysis machine accurately captures the touch down position of the probe pin on the measuring surface as well as its full travel across the surface without stubbing. Therefore, neither the touch down position, nor the end of travel position of the probe pin on the probe card analysis machine, matches corresponding positions on either an actual aluminum bonding pad or on a semiconductor test wafer imaged by a scrub mark analysis machine.

[0008] As is well known by those of ordinary skill in the art, it is desirable to accurately model the trajectory of a probe pin on a semiconductor bonding pad through

the use of analysis and test equipment. It is further apparent that neither the probe card analysis machine, nor the scrub mark analysis machine alone provide accurate data as to the true touch down position of a probe on a metalized bonding pad, and the true end of travel position of the probe pin on an aluminized bonding pad.

[0009] Therefore, a need exists for a measurement and analysis technique which will accurately predict the behavior of a semiconductor probe card pin on an aluminized bonding pad.

[0010] A further need exists for a probe card analysis and measurement technique which will quantitatively determine when a probe card and prober machine combination are out of tolerance for a specified task.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a method for accurately predicting the behavior of a semiconductor probe card probe pin on a semiconductor bonding pad.

[0012] It is further an object of the present invention to achieve the above object while quantitatively providing data relating to the adequacy of a probe card and prober machine combination in performing a task accurately.

[0013] It is yet another object of the present invention to provide data for optimizing performance of a probe card and/or prober machine based on the predicted behavior of a semiconductor probe card pin on a semiconductor die bonding pad.

[0014] The invention achieves these objects, and other objects and advantages which will become apparent from the description which follows by measuring the scrub pattern of semiconductor probe card pins with a probe card analysis machine, measuring scrub marks on a semiconductor test wafer made by a prober machine with a probe card of interest, and merging the resulting data to provide a data set having predictably accurate touch down and end of travel data for a plurality of probe card probe pins on a metalized semiconductor die surface.

[0015] In a preferred embodiment of the invention, error values are assigned to different, corresponding measurements in a data set from the probe card analysis machine and a data set from the scrub mark analysis machine. The error values are then minimized by iteratively incrementing mathematical horizontal, vertical and rotational values (e.g. X, Y and Θ) until the differences between the corresponding data from the scrub mark analysis machine and probe card analysis machine are compared.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016]

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of a semiconductor wafer having a plurality of dies.

Figure 2 is an enlarged, schematic representation of a semiconductor die indicated at circled area 2 of Figure 1.

Figure 3 is a sectional, schematic side elevational view of a probe card having a plurality of probe pins, and of a semiconductor wafer.

Figure 4 is a schematic representation of a scrub mark analyzed by a scrub mark analysis machine, and a scrub pattern analyzed by a probe card analysis machine.

Figure 5 (a through h) is a schematic representation of semiconductor die bonding pads having scrub marks thereon due to various probe card and/or prober machine errors.

Figure 6 is a schematic representation of one method for combining data sets of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0017] A semiconductor wafer is generally indicated at reference numeral 10 in Figure 1. A semiconductor wafer has a plurality of dies 12 arranged in orthogonal rows and columns across the surface of the wafer. A conventional wafer may have a diameter of up to eight inches and anywhere from 200 up to thousands of dies per wafer depending upon the complexity of the semiconductor circuits imbedded in each die. A representative die is generally indicated at reference number 12 in Figure 2. The die has a plurality of bonding pads 14 and a plurality of semiconductor circuits 16 surrounded by the bonding pads. The bonding pads typically have an aluminized surface which has been annealed. The bonding pads serve as an electrical intermediary between the world outside of the integrated circuit 16 and the circuit itself. Small wires (not shown) interconnect the bonding pads 14 with the semiconductor circuit 16. Another set of small wires (also not shown) interconnect the bonding pads with external pins (not shown) in a ceramic, or dual-in-line package (DIP) for connecting the integrated circuit into a larger circuit.

[0018] As shown in Figure 3, the bonding pads also provide positions for electronic probe pins 18 on a semiconductor probe card 20 to contact the bonding pads. As is well known to those of ordinary skill in the art, the semiconductor probe card 20 is received in a prober machine (not shown) as well as is the semiconductor wafer 10 so that when the probe pins 18 are in contact with the bonding pads 14 a plurality of electronic tests can be performed on the semiconductor circuit 16.

[0019] As is also well known to those of ordinary

skill in the art, it is common for the probe card pins 18 to become mis-aligned during use. Once the mis-alignment has exceeded predetermined tolerances, the probe card must be reworked and/or remanufactured to bring the tips 22 of the probe pins back into planarity, as well as back into horizontal registration with respect to one another, and with respect to the probe card 20. For this purpose, a variety of machines known as probe card analyzers have been constructed in which a relatively hard testing surface often termed a "check plate" is positioned in place of the semiconductor wafer 10. The check plate may have a very hard transparent window manufactured from sapphire or another synthetic crystal, or may be constructed from a tool hardened steel having various electrical discontinuities thereon so that the horizontal positioning of the respective pin tips 22 may be measured with respect to one another and with respect to the probe card. It is common during such testing that probe pins are over-traveled in the vertical (i.e. "Z") direction and will "scrub" along the surface of the check plate. As best seen in dashed lines in Figure 4 at reference number 24, a probe card analysis scrub pattern has a well defined starting or "touch down" point 26 and a well defined end of travel point 28. Unfortunately, due to the hardness of the check plate surface, this scrub pattern does not match a corresponding scrub mark 30 shown in solid lines in Figure 4 made in an actual bonding pad or test wafer.

[0020] Scrub mark 30 can be electronically imaged by an appropriate scrub mark analysis machine. The starting or touch down point 32 of the scrub mark in an aluminized surface such as a semiconductor die bonding pad is difficult to discern because the probe pin 18 is applying relatively little force to the aluminized surface. In fact, the touch down point on the aluminized surface should be where the touch down point 26 is shown when the same probe touches down on a probe card analysis check plate. However, the probe "skates" along the surface of the aluminized bonding pad before it begins to make a discernable mark, and the distance between the touch down point 26 as measured by the probe card analysis machine, and the touch down point 32 as measured by the scrub mark analysis machine has been termed by the Applicant as "skating distance" 34.

[0021] Similarly, the end of travel 36 of the probe pin tip in either an aluminized bonding pad, or the surface of a test wafer in a scrub mark analysis machine falls short of the end of travel point 28 as indicated by the probe card analysis machine. This is because shortly after the probe touches down at touch down point 32, the probe tip-digs into the aluminized surface of the bonding pad as a plow enters the ground. The coefficient of friction between the probe pin tip and the bonding pad quickly rises. As a result thereof, the probe "stubs" into the metalized surface when the force due to friction equals the forward force applied by the prober machine through the probe pin 18. The distance

between the end of travel point 36 as measured by the scrub mark analysis machine and the end of travel point 28 measured by the probe card analysis machine has been defined by the Applicant as the "stopping" distance 38.

[0022] It is apparent that in predicting the behavior of a probe card pin on a semiconductor bonding pad, it is the probe card analysis (PCA) machine touch down point 26 and scrub mark analysis (SMA) machine end of travel point 36 which are of principal interest to the operators of semiconductor prober machines. That is, it is undesirable to have the probe card pin touch down outside of the bonding pad area onto the soft passivation layer of the semiconductor die (and also in violation of various military standards for semiconductor products). It is also undesirable to have the probe pin 18 severely deformed by excessive stopping represented by stopping distance 38 so as to put either excessive pressure on the bonding pad such as to damage the pad or bend the pin. In addition, it is highly desirable, as shown in Figure 5, to determine the source of errors in a probe card and prober machine combination which may be due to errors in the prober machine itself.

[0023] Figure 5 schematically illustrates a series of bonding pads on a semi-conductor die having scrub marks left by a probe card/ prober combination. As shown in Figure 5 (a), all of the scrub marks are substantially centered in the pads as is desired. Figure 5(b) illustrates that either the probe pins, or more likely the prober machine itself, has offset the pins in the negative X direction. Figure 5(c) illustrates the situation in which the prober machine probably has an offset in the positive Y direction. Figure 5(d) illustrates that the probe card has been rotated about the Z-axis in a clockwise direction, or the pins have been twisted in that direction. Figure 5(e) illustrates excessively long scrub marks in both the X and Y directions, indicating that the prober is probably exerting too much force on the probe pins. Conversely, Figure 5(f) has small scrub marks which are not elongated, indicating that insufficient pressure is being applied in the Z direction by the prober machine. Figure 5(g) shows elongated scrub marks on the left hand side of the die, and very short scrub marks on the right hand side of the die. This configuration indicates a pitch error about the Y axis. Figure 5(h) indicates a roll error about the X-axis such that too much pressure is exerted on the probe pins in the upper portion of the die, and too little pressure is exerted on the pins in the lower portion of the die.

[0024] By combining scrub mark analysis data from the scrub mark analyzer and scrub pattern data from the probe card analysis machine, it is possible to predict more accurately the behavior of a probe pin on a semiconductor die metalization pad, as well as isolate whether the source of errors in probe pin position is due to the prober machine, or the position of the probe pins with respect to the probe card itself.

[0025] In a first preferred embodiment of the inven-

tion, correction factors in the X, Y, and Θ directions (left-right, up-down, and clockwise-counterclockwise as shown in Figure 6) are calculated so as to minimize differences in data sets relating to the stopping distance 38 shown in Figure 4. Figure 6 illustrates a representative set of orthogonal bonding pads 14 on a semiconductor die surface 12 in the X and Y directions. The pads have scrub marks 30 such as are to be analyzed by a scrub mark analysis machine. In an iterative fashion, a correction factor in the X, Y and Θ directions is added to a combined data set stored in a computer by a conventional computer program, such as the Excel database program available from Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington. An error value is then associated with the stopping distance 38 measured for each probe pin 18 associated with a bonding pad 14. As the X, Y and Θ correction factors or "offset values" are incremented, a minimum error value represented by the stopping distance 38 will be found. That minimum error value and the corresponding X, Y and Θ offsets quantitatively represent the degree to which the probe card and prober machine combination are out of tolerance. The error value may be calculated by simple summation of the stopping distance 38, as described above by averaging all of the stopping distances for all of the pads; or by summing the squares of the differences between the average stopping values and the differences between the end of travel positions between the probe card analysis machine and scrub mark analysis machine; or, a standard deviation of the ending position differences between the scrub mark analysis and probe mark analysis machines. The specific numerical method which the artisan of ordinary skill uses is an inconsequential activity with respect to the claimed invention.

[0026] Alternatively, in a second preferred embodiment of the invention, the error value may be associated with the skating distance 34 shown in Figure 4. In this alternate embodiment of the invention, an error value may be assigned to the sum of the differences between the average skating distance 34 for all of the scrub marks 30 and the sum of the differences between the touch down points 26 and 32 as measured by the probe card analysis machine and scrub mark analysis machine, respectively. As stated with respect to the first preferred embodiment of the invention, a sum of the difference of the squares, or a standard deviation technique may also be used to define the error value. As stated with respect to the first preferred embodiment, in this alternate embodiment correction factors in the X direction, Y direction and Θ direction are incrementally applied to the measured locations of the touch down points correlating to the skating distance 34 until the error value is minimized. The correction factors in X, Y and Θ thus relate to the degree to which the probe card and prober machine combination are out of tolerance.

[0027] In a third embodiment of the invention, the center of the scrub marks is defined by the scrub mark

analysis machine mathematically as a straight line between the touch down point 32 and end of travel point 36 measured by the scrub mark analysis machine and a mathematical straight line between the touch down point 26 and end of travel point 28 as defined and measured by the probe card analysis machine. This scrub mark center line 40 can also be directly measured by the scrub mark analysis machine from the left or right edge of the bonding pad 14 in the X-axis and the top or bottom edge of the bottom edge in the Y-axis as shown in Figure 6. The error value can then be assigned as the sum of the absolute values of the center lines 40 with respect to the edge of their respective bonding pad or as the sum of the squares of those measurements. By incrementing correcting factors in the X, Y and Θ directions, the minimum error value resulting from that incremental analysis gives the X, Y and Θ correction factors which are representative to the degree to which the probe card and prober machine combination are out of tolerance.

[0028] In a fourth embodiment of the invention, the minor axis 42 of the scrub marks can be measured by both the scrub mark analysis machine and the probe mark analysis machine and the error factors applied as set forth above with respect to the third embodiment of the invention.

[0029] Furthermore, by comparing the data sets collected for the scrub patterns from the probe card analysis machine, the scrub marks from the scrub mark analysis machine, and the orientation of the errors as shown in figure 5, it can be determined whether the errors are due to mis-alinement of the probes with respect to the card, or the card with respect to the prober machine. These errors are particularly apparent where the dies being tested are located at the perimeter of the semiconductor wafer.

[0030] Finally, it is desirable to scrub the test wafer 10 in the probe machine with a hot chuck or other means for heating the wafer and the probe card 20 to the approximate operating temperature of an integrated circuit of interest. As a result, the scrub marks and their positioning are similar to those of actual bonding pad scrub marks or a semiconductor die undergoing testing on a probe machine. A suitable hot chuck is available from Temptronic Corporation, Newton, Massachusetts, U.S.A. under the model name "Thermochuck TPO 3000". The hot chuck can also be used during the scrub mark analysis machine imaging step to improve the accuracy of those measurements.

[0031] In view of the above, those of ordinary skill in the art will envision other alternate embodiments of the invention not described in detail above. Therefore, the invention is to be determined in scope by the claims which follow.

Claims

1. A method for quantifying a representative misalign-

ment of probe pin tips arranged in orthogonal rows and columns on a semiconductor probe card and prober machine combination, comprising the steps of:

measuring a plurality of elongated scrub patterns of probe card pins on a probe card analyzer having a relatively hard, smooth measuring surface to obtain probe card analyzer touchdown and end travel positions for a plurality of probe pins on the probe card defining a probe card analyzer data set; impressing the probe card pins with a prober machine on a test wafer having a pin contact surface which closely models semiconductor bonding pads in hardness and surface friction, and measuring a plurality of elongated scrub marks produced on the contact surface with a scrub mark analyzer machine to obtain scrub mark analyzer touchdown and end travel positions defining a scrub mark analyzer data set; merging the probe card analyzer and scrub mark analyzer data sets to generate a merged data set having touch down data from the probe card analyzer data set and end travel data from the scrub mark analyzer data set; assigning error values to differences between corresponding scrub mark analyzer and probe card analyzer data in the merged data set; and mathematically optimizing the merged data set with orthogonal and rotational offsets to minimize the error values, whereby the orthogonal and rotational offsets represent quantitative misalignments of probe pins in the probe card and prober machine combination.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the error value is defined as the difference between probe card analyzer and scrub mark analyzer end travel positions.
3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the error value is defined as the difference between probe card analyzer and scrub mark analyzer touch down positions.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein major axes between touch down and end travel positions define probe card scrub pattern paths and scrub mark analyzer scrub mark paths, wherein probe card scrub pattern paths and scrub mark analyzer scrub mark paths are mathematically determined from the merged data set, and wherein the error value is defined as differences between probe card analyzer scrub pattern paths and scrub mark analyzer scrub mark paths.
5. The method of Claim 4, wherein the test wafer pin contact surface has a plurality of contact pads

arranged in orthogonal rows and columns generally corresponding to the orthogonal positions of the probe card pins.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein the test wafer is heated approximately to the operating temperature of a semiconductor device of interest during the probe card impressing and scrub mark measuring steps.

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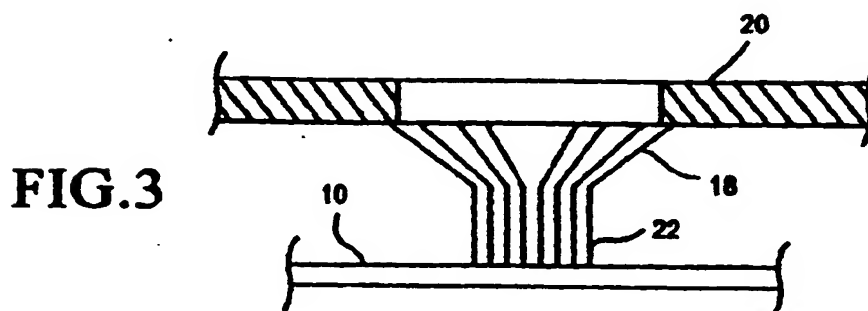
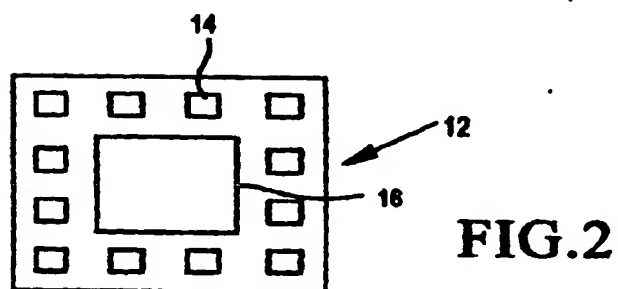
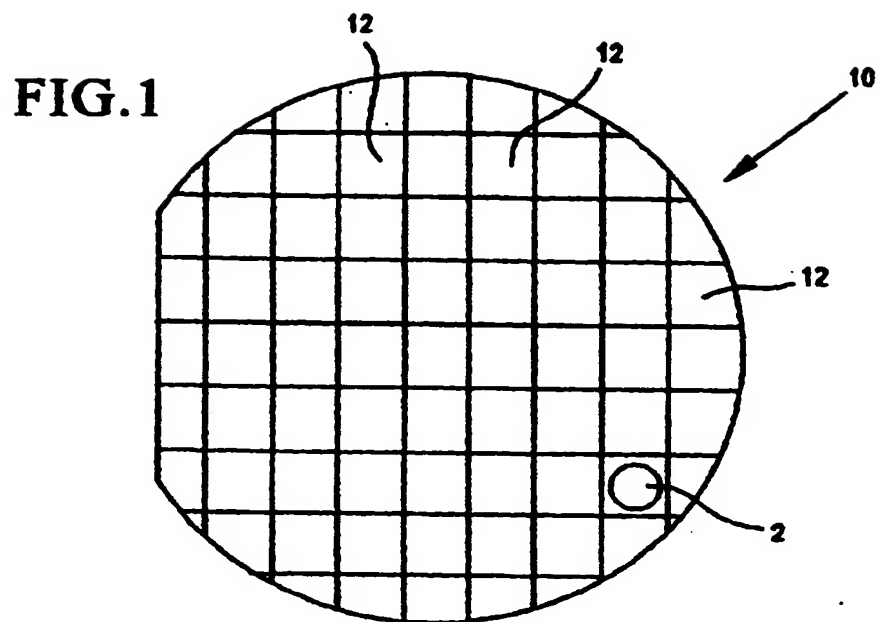
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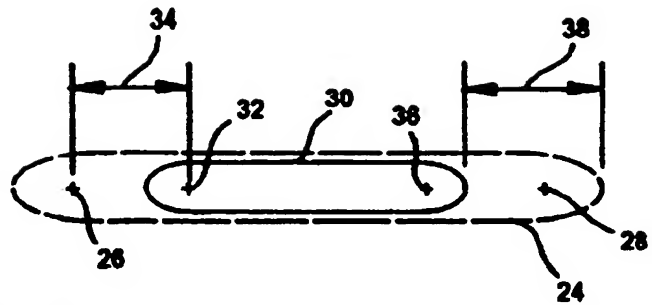


FIG. 4

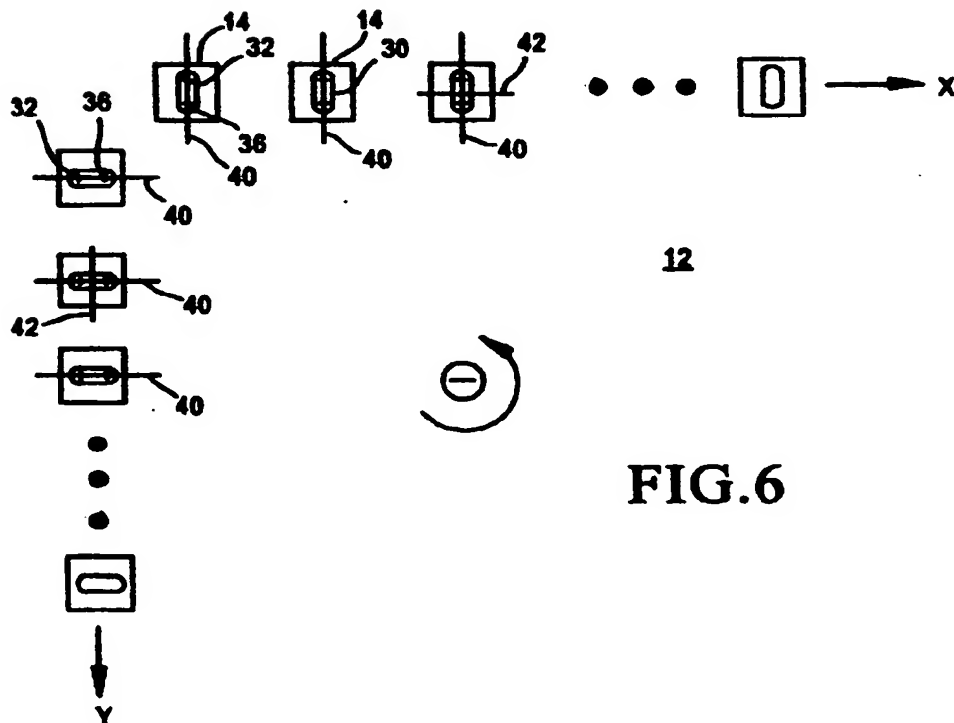


FIG. 6

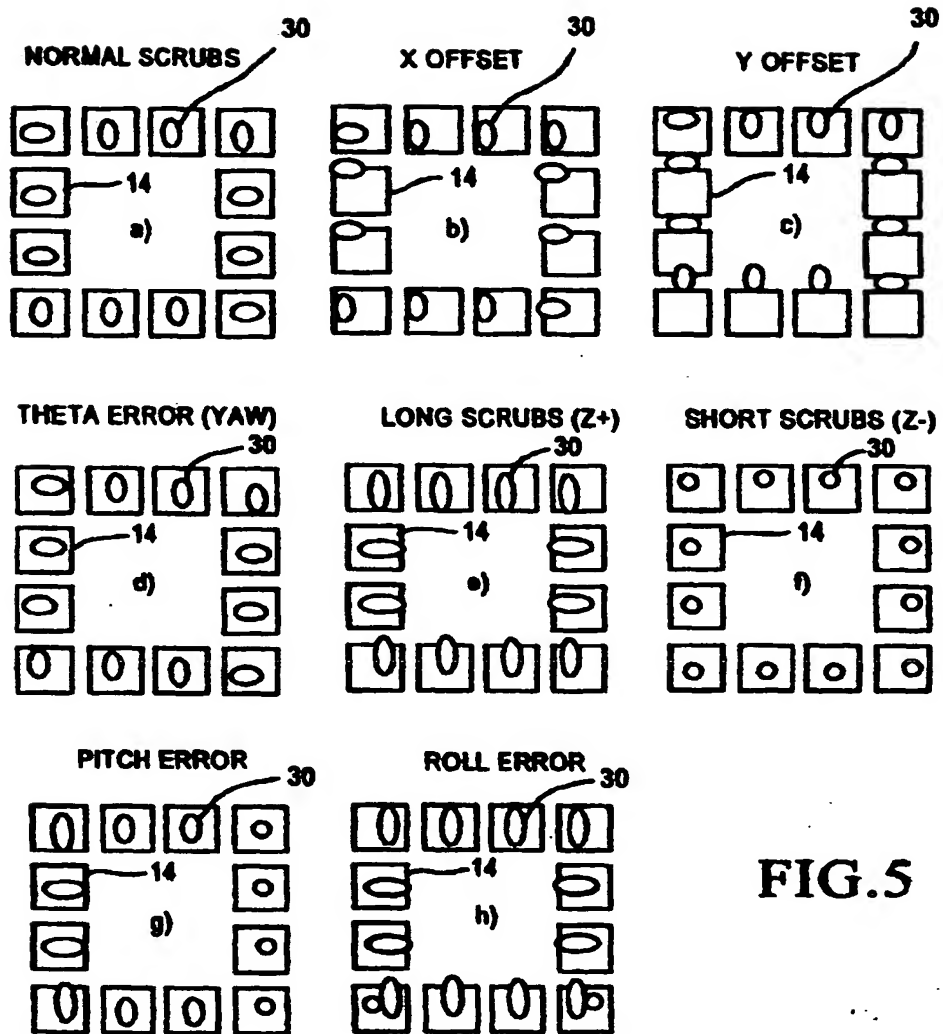
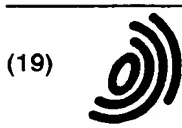


FIG.5



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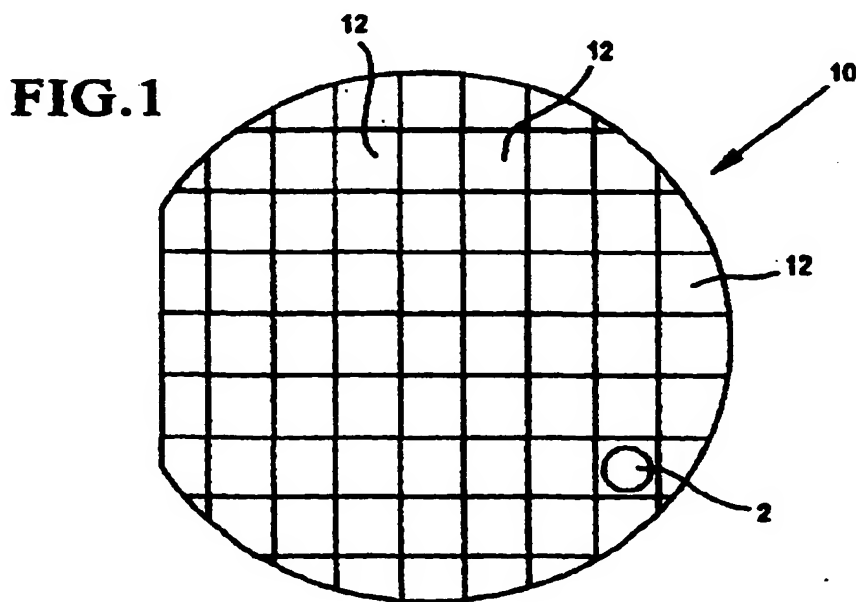
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European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 00 11 2260

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
D,A	US 5 657 394 A (SCHWARTZ ET AL.) 12 August 1997 (1997-08-12) * column 3, line 19 - column 4, line 5 * * column 4, line 52 - column 6, line 33 * * column 15, line 13 - line 26 * * column 15, line 50 - line 54; figure 6 *	1	G01R35/00 G01R1/067
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A	US 5 644 245 A (SAITOH ET AL.) 1 July 1997 (1997-07-01) * abstract * * column 2, line 19 - line 56 * * column 3, line 9 - line 35 * * column 7, line 19 - column 8, line 16 * * column 8, line 53 - line 59 * * column 9, line 14 - column 10, line 21 * * column 13, line 30 - line 39 * * column 21, line 22 - line 29 * * column 22, line 4 - line 32; figures 1,3,5,7-18,20 *	1	<div>TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)</div> <div>G01R</div>
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 2 August 2001	Examiner Iwansson, K
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EPO FORM 1503 03 02 (P44001)

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 00 11 2260

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